

THE JEWELS OF STORYTELLERS

The gang was waiting for
me
in our sagging gazebo
all the section-eight
storytellers
their tongues lubricated
with the oil of gladness

How vulnerable they are
how loving
their very faults are
rough jewels
little white lies
big bravado rubies

Pearls of great price in every
telling
heaped around me
so greedy—
I gather up all of them
and carry them home

PATTERN OF MEN

His parents can't really afford to
show off their credit card
travels
but they make two trips a year
My grand-nephew Brent
rushed in here after Easter
his skinny kid chest
lost in a wild jungle of color

Look here, Auntie
I bought this mola in
the San Blas Islands
Cool, ain't it
which gave me a headache
Is this the way they teach English
at Robert Louis Stevenson
Private School

in a grove of trees
along Carmel Seven Mile Drive
his daddy squeezes out nice money
to send him there
Why do I remember his grandfather
hoed cotton to buy the type of shirt
Rudolph Valentino wore

—Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel
Tulare, CA

THE MUSTY FAMILIAR

Ten days after their breakup, she takes an armful of things that remind her too much of him to the local thrift store. As she enters the building, the smell of sweat, mothballs, and old age reminds her that she, too, is now a discard. She hates that smell. His whole house smelled like that; they had gone to several thrift stores before she made the connection. Trying to ignore the tightness in her throat, she goes to the back of the store to the glassware, where she finds two more juice glasses she's been collecting and a lid for an orphaned casserole dish. On her way to the checkout, a pin-striped vest, exactly what she's wanted for months, catches her eye; the vest is a perfect color and fit. She puts her money on the counter and inhales deeply. Not once. Several times. And she leaves with more than she brought in.

—Sandra Spencer
Denton, TX